

A Homily preached by the Reverend Roger B. White, Rector of St Andrew's Parish, Kent, Connecticut

Isaiah 6.1-8; Psalm 138; I Corinthians 15.1-11; Luke 5.1-11

From the Psalm appointed for today: 'O LORD, your love endures forever; do not abandon the works of your hands.'

When five months ago the Convention of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut voted that all of our congregations would observe today, the Fifth Sunday After the Epiphany, as a Day, beginning a Season, of Racial Healing, Justice, and Reconciliation, no one could have foreseen how 'of the moment' such a day and season would be .... This weekend, the news is filled – indeed fraught—with illustrations of how the legacies of the slave trade, the American Civil War, and the era of Reconstruction have left deep wounds in our society and social fabric that continue to cause deep pain, anger, and grief.

And the words of the Psalmist can resonate equally deeply, if we allow them: 'O LORD, your love endures forever; do not abandon the works of your hands'. For we, each of us, are among these works, and we do not want God to be finished with any of us just yet.

Nor does St Paul want to give up on any of the Corinthians, anyone in the Church in Corinth. They are a fractious and contentious group, some contending that their gift of speaking in tongues is superior to any other gifts of the Spirit, such as teaching or healing; and Paul replies by saying that the gifts of the Spirit are many and equally important. Some insist that they are prophets whose pronouncements are indisputable, and Paul pushes back and says that several people need to listen to these pronouncements and discern just how indisputably the Spirit is speaking through them. And this morning we hear that some refuse to believe that there can be a Resurrection of the dead. And each time that Paul hears about what one group are insisting about their stranglehold on the truth, Paul challenges .... We preach that Christ has been Resurrected from the dead, and so this must be our faith, our hope, our calling as well.

Resurrection means new life, changed life, not mere revivification. The death of seeds means the birth of plants: the seed changes, and in whatever kinds of deaths the rest of us endure, each of us also emerges ... changed. Belief in the Easter Resurrection means that God is calling us, always calling us, to change, to become different –to reconsider what we have been thinking, saying, and doing, to allow the Spirit to lead us into new ways of listening, hearing, seeing, and being. For, to believe in the Resurrection is to believe, to trust, that in fact God is not finished with us, any of us; that each of us can and in fact become different, can keep becoming still more different until we are acting more and more, sounding more and more, like the LORD of New Life, the Resurrected Christ.

The prophet Isaiah protests that the words that come from his mouth, like those that come from the other mouths around him, are unworthy of the LORD; and sees a seraph –an angel—touch his lips with a burning coal and hears the angel say that all of that is old news, assuring him that the

LORD can work through him, that he can change the way he thinks and become the LORD'S prophet.

As Luke's Gospel tells it, Jesus seeks out Peter, James, and John, who are dispirited because of a luckless night of fishing. He commandeers one of their boats and uses it to preach to them and a lot of other people. Presumably he preaches what a couple of weeks ago we heard him tell the synagogue in Nazareth –that 'the Spirit of the LORD is upon me ... to bring good news to the poor ... to proclaim release to the captive ... recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and he then tells the exhausted and discouraged fisherman to try again. They protest but obey, and their catch of fish is at once miraculous, overwhelming, so large as to begin sinking the boats. Terrified, Peter pleads with Jesus just to go away just to leave them alone; and Jesus replies that they are better at catching things with him, and that therefore their lives need to change, will change: they will no longer seek to catch fish but rather to make disciples of the Good News, the Gospel.

Isaiah hears the call to begin doing things differently, to be changed. So do Peter, James, and John, as do countless of the other disciples –*discipuli*, 'students'—who follow them, because God's love for the Creation and its beloved Creatures endures forever, and God will not abandon the works of God's own hands .... God in Christ Jesus will continue to summon us students to think again about what we have been thinking, to think anew, to think, speak, and act ... differently than we have done ....

My youngest Godson is Puerto Rican, obviously darker skinned than I am, with my Scandinavian heritage. Midway through high school he moved from a large and diverse suburban school to a smaller and rather different one. He is a sweet guy –quiet, keenly observant, shy, a bit withdrawn—and at first he ate lunch pretty much by himself. A lighter-skinned boy quickly started to mock his lonesomeness, his isolation, and because no one protested, the mocking grew louder, more obsessive. True to form, JJ endured it silently as long as he could, but when one day the other boy entered their classroom, sniffed the air with disgust, and announced, 'Smells like 'Ricans in here', JJ shot up from his seat and (astonishingly) challenged, 'Should we take this outside ...?' The other boy fled the room in tears, and the next time at lunch there was someone who sat with JJ .... And then another, and then another .... They listened. They heard his cry, and they began to act ... differently. They changed, and the world around them changed, too. It can happen ....

There are so many things that divide us from one another, and race and skin color are prominently among them. The Scriptures –the prophets and the writers and the Gospel—insist that this can change, that we must allow it, make it to change.

Listen. And when we hear cries of fear, of anguish, the summons is to do something –to comfort, to relieve, and to bless for Christ's sake, remembering what the Risen LORD who refused to distinguish amongst Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles would have done, would have said. The summons is for us to change this world, our world, to continue the Easter work of Resurrection: it can happen .... Amen.